

Idle No More returns to state Capitol

Written by John S. Adams Tribune Capital Bureau

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HELENA – Members of the growing Idle No More movement made a second appearance at the state Legislature on Monday with a rally and round dance on the north steps of the Capitol.

The Idle No More movement gained international attention after Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper refused to meet with Canadian tribal governments about a bill that many Indians believed undermined bedrock environmental laws.

Over the past few months, the movement has spread across the border into the U.S., and Idle No More demonstrations have been popping across the country.

About 50 supporters of the movement demonstrated at the Capitol on the first day of the legislative session Jan. 7. About three times that many people were present at Monday's rally.

Speakers said the Idle No More movement is not just about issues affecting indigenous people.

"Idle No More is about sovereignty, not only tribal nations but it's about sovereignty for self-determination for the people across this nation. The poorest of the poor. The people who are oppressed," said Sen. Sharon Stewart-Peregoy, D-Crow Agency.

Blackfeet tribal member Gyasi Ross, of Browning, said Idle No More gives a voice to the poorest people, whom he said fall victim to government policies influenced by the rich.

"It's a voiceless people's movement," Ross said. "It's a people who are formerly idle, taking control and saying 'We will not be victims anymore.'"

Ross said the reason Idle No More is mostly associated with issues concerning indigenous people is because "a disproportionate number of native people are poor."

Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy, D-Box Elder, is carrying Senate Resolution 9 supporting the Idle No More movement.

The resolution states, in part, "that the Montana Senate supports the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights and the commitment to improve relationships with tribes and tribal leaders and all indigenous individuals and communities in the United States."

The measure also calls for the resolution, if passed, to be sent to Secretary of State John Kerry and Susan Rice, the U.S. representative to the United Nations as well as Montana's delegation.

The resolution is scheduled for a hearing Friday in the Senate Education and Cultural Resources Committee.